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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000843

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2014

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SUBJECT: ZANU-PF WRESTS MP SEAT FROM MDC IN RURAL
BY-ELECTION

REF: HARARE 790

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

11. (C) SUMMARY: Along with Harare based diplomats from ten other countries, Poloff observed a May 15 - 16 parliamentary by-election in the rural Matabeleland North district of Lupane -- a traditional MDC stronghold. ZANU-PF narrowly won the seat by a margin of over 800 votes in an election characterized by a lower level of violence but widespread intimidation. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) ZANU-PF candidate Martin Khumalo polled 10,069 votes to the MDC candidate Njabuliso Mguni's 9,186 for a total of 19,255 votes cast, or about 40 percent of the 48,134 registered voters. In the 2000 and 2002 parliamentary elections the MDC polled about 14,500 votes, whereas ZANU-PF polled 3,300 in 2000 and 7,778 in 2002. Total votes cast for the two parties was 17,739 in 2000, and 22,302 in 2002.

Campaign Messages

13. (C) Poloff attended ZANU-PF rally in Zwangendaba on May 14 in which Minister without Portfolio Elliot Manyika said (in Shona) that the government allowed you to kill white people if they tried to take your farm. Manyika also criticized the UK and US for being the worst human rights abusers in the world, sponsoring the MDC, and trying to take back farms. A subsequent speaker gave detailed instructions, and threats, on checking in with ZANU-PF list holders who would be positioned about 150 yards from polling stations. He said those who did not check in would be "dealt with". About 260 presumably non-voting secondary school students, and another 100 adults attended the rally. The Vice-President, other Ministers, and ruling party MPs all descended on Lupane giving speeches at other rallies in the week before voting.

Violence

14. (U) A generally lower level of direct violence characterized the pre-election period, but both parties reported a handful of attacks on their supporters by members of the other party (Ref).

15. (U) MDC officials reported that war vets handcuffed, beat and harassed an MDC youth member in Lupanda on May 13, and attacked an unnamed MDC polling agent also on May 13. Police were still holding that polling agent on May 14.

16. (U) MDC officials said that in the evening of May 13, about twenty ZANU-PF youths attacked MDC campaign headquarters with stones. MDC youths threw stones back and repelled the attackers.

17. (U) On May 11 police arrested MDC Matabeleland North Provincial Chairperson Morgan Komichi and eighteen other MDC supporters at the Lupane business center after the MDC members confronted ZANU-PF supporter Ntombikayise Maphosa. According to the MDC, Maphosa was ripping down MDC posters, but ZANU-PF officials said she was hanging ZANU-PF posters. ZANU-PF officials said that MDC members attacked Maphosa with an axe. Police in Lupane said they did not think Maphosa sustained axe wounds but rather was injured as she scrambled under a vehicle to evade the MDC members.

18. (U) ZANU-PF officials said that on May 12 four MDC youths attacked Sandra Ncube as she returned home from a ZANU-PF rally in Siziphile.

Intimidation

19. (U) MDC officials said that on May 13, ZANU-PF supporters visited the Mshope family shop and residence late at night, threatened Mrs. Mshope, and damaged and looted the shop. The Mshopes had both campaigned for MDC candidate Mguni.

110. (U) On May 12 police arrested forty-four MDC members on

their way to a rally in Tshotsholo. MDC officials said some were beaten, forty were released without charge, and four were charged with a weapons offense for carrying slingshots.

11. (U) According to MDC officials, on several occasions ZANU-PF youths disrupted MDC rallies by chanting slogans or organizing a mini ZANU-PF rally near the scheduled MDC one. MDC officials said that hundreds of suspected ZANU-PF youth militia members were deployed to Lupane in the weeks before voting to threaten and harass residents, sometimes camping in or around polling stations.

12. (C) According to ZANU-PF officials, on May 13, MDC youths threatened village headman Mutunzi Mutusanzi allegedly for supporting ZANU-PF.

Voting Days -----

13. (C) Over this vast rural constituency with only a few tarred roads there were forty-four stationary polling stations, and about eleven mobile polling stations. Each of the mobile stations covered four consecutive locations over the two days of voting. Poloff and other diplomats observed assisted voting of young people (a tactic used by ZANU-PF to guarantee its votes), ZANU-PF campaign posters posted near and around polling stations, ZANU-PF officials taking down names of voters outside polling areas before and after voting, government vehicles being used to ferry voters to polling stations, and voters waiting at prospective mobile polling sites. At one polling station where assisted voting was proceeding, the presiding officer asked Poloff to leave. Zimbabwe Elections Support Network, (ZESN -- an independent local NGO), officials were not seen at any of the mobile polling stations. MDC officials reported that war vets were present at a few polling stations, and disrupted voting at at least one. Police removed war vets from two polling stations.

Comment: -----

14. (C) By organizing and often threatening village headmen to instruct residents to vote ZANU-PF; by spreading rumors that the government would carry out a second Gukurahundi (massacre) on residents of Lupane; by influencing police to selectively arrest and beat MDC supporters; and by deploying hundreds of youth militia members, the ruling party successfully created a threatening overtone for this election. Having garnered only 18 - 25 percent of the vote in previous elections, ZANU-PF had the statistical odds stacked against it. Through superior organizing and its usual tactics it nonetheless managed to wrest the Lupane seat from the MDC. This result brings ZANU-PF to within two seats of the two-thirds parliamentary super-majority needed to amend the constitution. Convicting any of the numerous MDC MPs facing criminal charges could result in further MDC parliamentary seats becoming open for election in the coming months.

15. (C) Minister Manyika's comments on killing white people who might try to take back the land made little sense in an entirely communal area with no commercial farms, no resettled farms, and no resettled farmers.
SULLIVAN